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With nearly 13 million online users, the rapidly expanding virtual world Second Life is a risk for children, who could be sexually exploited, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) said Monday.

Kirk sent a letter to the Federal Trade Commission requesting a consumer-alert warning about its dangers.

Mt. Prospect Mayor Irvana Wilks said the community has been concerned about Internet predators.

"This Second Life is a new scare, uncharted territory," Wilks said at a news conference Monday with Kirk at the Mt. Prospect Police Department. "It hits home."

Kirk said he knew of no cases in which children were targeted by sexual predators on Second Life, but he said he considers the virtual world an emerging danger.

"Members of the Second Life community, including Linden Lab staff, actively monitor against minors accessing the [adult portion of the] service," according to a statement from the San Francisco-based firm that created it.

Users of Second Life assume characters known as avatars, and can play, date and do business in a 3-D world that resembles a video game.

The dark side of the Internet site quickly became evident when one of his aides created an account last week, Kirk said.

The aide tried and failed to log in as a 10-year-old. But she gained access, she said, using the same e-mail address when she claimed to be 18.

Within half an hour, the aide said, she was perusing pornography and roaming in "virtual rape rooms" and drug dens.

"If you ask: Do you know about MySpace? The average parent will say yes," Kirk said. "But the average parent doesn't know anything about Second Life."

Linden Lab has two virtual districts, one for people 18 and older and one for users age 13 to 17, but company officials have acknowledged it is possible for adults to get into the teen district and for children to get into the adult district, according to news accounts.